Society of American Archivists
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Standards Committee: Request for Council Approval of the
Archival Accessioning Best Practices
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BACKGROUND

The Standards Committee of the Society of American Archivists recommends SAA Council approve the *Archival Accessioning Best Practices*.

The National Best Practices for Archival Accessioning Working Group officially launched in 2021 in response to a shifting professional landscape that was beginning to focus on the importance of accessioning in the management of archival materials. Traditional definitions of accessioning did not appear to capture accurately the complex and multi-faceted work of archival accessioning, which spans the pre-custodial and post-custodial periods of archival work. The National Best Practices Working Group was established to support accessioning work by drafting and publishing best practices that would be shared profession-wide.

The *Archival Accessioning Best Practices* have been in the making for approximately five years. The creation story begins in 2019, when Rosemary K. J. Davis (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University) and Meaghan O'Riordan (Archives, Moravian Church in America, Southern Province) initiated a research project to build a network of archival accessioning peers. This developed into a wider initiative to build an accessioning community of practice. Davis and O'Riordan successfully applied to IMLS for funding to host a nationwide meeting for accessioning practitioners and submitted a proposal to the SAA Standards Committee to form a working group for the formal development of best practices for archival accessioning. The Working Group's proposal to create the accessioning best practices was approved by the Standards Committee in 2021, with sponsorship from the Accessioning, Acquisitions, and Appraisal Section (which was renamed after a successful petition from the Working Group to include the accessioning function in the Section's portfolio). The Working Group was charged for three years and, by Spring 2021, an inclusive group of 30 archival practitioners had been selected to serve on it. The first year of work focused on creating a leadership group and the second year on developing the best practices and organizing an in-person summit of all working group members to allow for important in-person collaboration among group members. The final year focused on the revision of the *Best Practices*, circulation of the

Best Practices for public feedback, the submission to the Standards Committee for approval, and community engagement.

DISCUSSION

Despite the new focus on accessioning that has been evident in the archival profession for the past few years, individuals performing accessioning are still often isolated and under-supported, and sometimes have to combat misunderstanding of the necessity and complexity of their efforts. The *Best Practices* emerged from a desire to provide those who were tasked with accessioning with a standard set of best practices to use in their own work and to advocate for the importance of accessioning work within institutions of varying sizes and types. The *Best Practices* put archival accessioning center stage as "the basis of all stewardship."

These *Best Practices* have generated a great deal of interest and activity in the archival profession for the past few years. The *Best Practices* were being conceptualized and drafted during the same period as the publication of Audra Eagle Yun's influential book *Archival Accessioning* (2021), the first SAA publication dedicated fully to the labor of accessioning.

The Working Group's commitment to a "generous, inclusive, and supportive" philosophy and approach in drafting the standard has also been praised extensively. This approach shaped the process of selecting members of the Working Group, the community compact and code of conduct around which the Working Group members agreed to function, the solicitation of external feedback, and the final revision process.

Potential members of the Working Group submitted applications with information about personal identity, professional experience, and motivation to improve accessioning work. The co-chairs of the Working Group prioritized applicants of diverse backgrounds with practical experience and enthusiasm about improving accessioning practices. Members agreed to a community compact that centered intention, encouraged non-oppressive and encouraging atmospheres for sharing ideas, and focused on the development of resources that would help all individuals performing or managing aspects of archival accessioning.

External feedback to the draft standard was solicited by the Working Group over a six-week period via a survey. The survey was sent to all 100 individuals who originally expressed an interest in participating in the Working Group and shared with a range of listservs, including BitCurator, DLF, SAA's Acquisition, Accessioning, and Appraisal (AA&A) Section, SAA Announcements, Digital Curation Google Group, and Midwest Archives Conference. Members also shared widely within their own networks. Seventy-four responses were received. Though some respondents had questions about how the *Best Practices* might look at their local institutions, feedback was very positive.

The Group proposed (and the SAA Standards Committee supports) an initial revision cycle of three years and then, after 2027, five years, but suggested that the SAA

Standards Committee identify the optimal cycle after the 2027 revision is complete. The Working Group will formally hand over the *Best Practices* to the AA&A Section leadership and ensure a smooth transition by ensuring that all documentation is handed over and that all necessary passwords and permissions are transferred.

The Working Group published the *Best Practices* in a GitBook for ease of access and efficient management. If it is determined, over time, that the GitBook format no longer meets the needs for the standard, all associated documents can be exported from the GitHub repository as markdown files and migrated to a preferred platform.

For the full National Best Practices for Archival Accessioning Working Group's standards submission package see Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SAA Council approves the *Archival Accessioning Best Practices, v.1.0* as an SAA standard and that maintenance of the standard be assigned to the Acquisitions, Accessioning, and Appraisal section with a next revision due in 2027.

Support Statement: SAA's support of the *Archival Accessioning Best Practices* would provide important and necessary national endorsement of this new standard, provide essential new levels of support for archival accessioning work, allow for continuing professional efforts in this area of archival work, and create the conditions for the standard to be managed over the long-term by the Acquisitions, Accessioning, and Appraisal Section.

Impact on Strategic Priorities:

SAA Council's approval of the *Archival Accessioning Best Practices* is consistent with Strategic Priorities 2.2 and 3.1:
2.2 Provide content, via education and publications, that reflects the latest thinking and best practices in the field.
3.1. Identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices and lead or participate in their development.

Fiscal Impact: None

Appendix 1: *Archival Accessioning Best Practices* Submission Package